



PRESS RELEASE

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CIWS live-fire exercise proves systems' worth

By Chief Mass Communication Specialist (SW) Jason Chudy, Kitty Hawk public affairs

USS KITTY HAWK, At Sea -- They're part of USS Kitty Hawk's (CV 63) last line of defense, but one of the ship's two Close-in Weapons Systems, or CIWS, proved its value by "killing" a towed drone Dec. 2 during the system's first live-fire targeting exercise in more than three and a half years.

The carrier's CIWS, which are operated by Combat Systems CS-73 Division, are located at the aft end of the ship. Each Mk-15 Phalanx system consists of a radar-controlled six-barreled 20mm rotating Gatling gun system that can fire up to 4,500 tungsten rounds per minute.

Fire Controlman 3rd Class John Laredo, of San Antonio, was in charge of the CIWS remote control panel in the ship's Combat Direction Center (CDC) during the drill, which was part of a Phalanx readiness exercise.

"The first thing that went through my mind was 'don't screw up,'" said Laredo, who's been on Kitty Hawk for two and a half months. "Then you hear the gun start firing and you know it's going to go the way you want it to go."

Laredo normally works on the port-side CIWS, designated Mount 24, but the starboard Mount 25 made the "kill."

An aircraft towed the drone, called a TDU, on a 12,000-foot-long cable towards the ship. CIWS Mount 25 tracked, and then "killed," it.

The CIWS unit fired about 180 rounds at the drone, hitting it multiple times.

"Our motto is 'if it flies, it dies,'" said Fire Controlman 2nd Class Josephy Gallagher, of Waldport, Ore., CIWS work center supervisor.

While this was the first CIWS TDU shoot since Feb. 9, 2003, the system is normally test-fired weekly at sea, explained Lt. Gus Cuyler, who was the CDC air warfare officer during the shoot.

Cuyler explained that in addition to the weekly firings, CS-73 personnel use the CIWS radar to track a selected Carrier Air Wing 5 aircraft every few months.

“We’re required to do this every three months,” he explained. “We usually do it every other month.

“We go through the whole thing (for firing) with the exception that there are no live rounds,” he said.

For the air wing tracking exercises, the live ammunition is replaced with “dummy” rounds that can’t fire. Live ammunition, however, was used during last Saturday’s TDU shoot.

Many times, said Gallagher, the live rounds will sever the towing cable and the drone would be lost at sea. This time, however, the drone stayed attached and was sent back to the ship on a VRC-30 Carrier Onboard Delivery cargo aircraft the next morning.

“We had two hours to take pictures, and we did,” said Laredo. “We’d do anything to show that we got bullet holes in the TDU.”

The drone was then moved to the divisional office, where it hangs on the bulkhead as a “trophy.”

It’s a trophy, however, that each tech will be able to have a piece to remember the shoot by.

“It has fins on it and everyone signed a fin,” said Gallagher about the CIWS technicians. “When we rotate off, we’ll take our fin. Everyone gets a piece of the pie.”

The Kitty Hawk Strike Group is the largest carrier strike group in the Navy. It includes the Kitty Hawk, the aircraft squadrons and staff of Carrier Air Wing 5, the guided-missile cruisers USS Shiloh (CG 67) and USS Cowpens (CG 63), and Destroyer Squadron 15 staff. The group’s ships and destroyer squadron staff operate from Fleet Activities Yokosuka, Japan, and the air wing and staff operate from Naval Air Facility Atsugi, Japan.

To find more news about the Kitty Hawk Strike Group, visit the Navy NewsStand at www.news.navy.mil/local/cv63.

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